Coordinates: 43.725429°N 79.331997°W

Aga Khan Museum

The **Aga Khan Museum** (French: *Musée Aga Khan*) is a museum of Islamic art, Iranian (Persian) art and Muslim culture located at 77 Wynford Drive in the North York district of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.[1] The first museum in the western world dedicated to Islamic art and objects,[2] it houses more than 1,000 rare objects including artifacts from the private collections of His Highness the Aga Khan, the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, and Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan. As an initiative of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network, the museum is dedicated to presenting an overview of the artistic, intellectual, and scientific contributions that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage. The Museum's mission is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the contribution that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage. Through education, research, and collaboration, the Museum will foster dialogue and promote tolerance and mutual understanding among people. In addition to the Permanent Collection, the Aga Khan Museum features several temporary exhibitions each year that respond to current scholarship, emerging themes, and new artistic developments. The Museum Collection and exhibitions are complemented by educational programs and performing arts events.

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Exterior view of the Aga Khan Museum

Location of the museum in Toronto

Established	September 18, 2014
Location	Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Coordinates	43.725429°N 79.331997°W
Type	Muslim arts and culture
Collection size	1,000
Director	Henry Kim
Public transit access	100 34C 5 *Aga Khan Park* (opening 2021)
Website	www.agakhanmuseum.org (http://www.agakhanmuseum.org/)

For many years, His Highness the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of Shia Ismaili Muslims, was planning to build a major museum for Islamic art and artifacts that aligned with the Ismaili community's mission to offer new perspectives into Islamic civilizations by weaving together cross-cultural threads throughout history. The location in Don Mills, Toronto, Canada, was confirmed in 2002, after protests blocked a $60-million Canadian offer for a site on the River Thames across from the British Houses of Parliament.[3] The Aga Khan then chose Canada as a tribute to the country's pluralism.[2]

The Aga Khan Foundation purchased the Bata Shoes Head Office, in preparation for the museum's construction in 2002.

The Aga Khan bought the former Bata Shoes Head Office, a building that was adjacent to the Ismaili Centre, which was already under construction. Designed by modernist architect John B. Parkin, the building was demolished in 2007 after it was determined to be unsuitable for the museum. The new structure was designed by Pritzker Prize winner Fumihiko Maki. It also shares the 6.8 hectare space with public gardens created by Lebanese landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic.

The foundation-laying ceremony for the project was performed by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Aga Khan on May 28, 2010.[4]

European tour

While a permanent home was being built for the collection, selected items went on tour in Europe. Exhibitions took place at the following institutions:

- Palazzo della Pilotta in Parma[5][6]
- Ismaili Centre in London[7]
- Louvre in Paris[8][9]
- Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon[10]
- CaixaForum Madrid
- CaixaForum Barcelona[11]
- Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin[12]
- Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul[13]
- The Hermitage in St. Petersburg[14]

The exhibits received wide international acclaim.[7][15] The exhibit conveys both *Dīn* and *Dunya*, which can be translated as 'Spirit & Life' — the religious and secular aspects of life which are inextricably linked in Muslim cultures.[8] The first exhibitions were organized in two parts: *The Word of God* consisting of sacred texts and related objects and *The Power of the Sovereign* reflecting Muslim courts and their figures. More recent exhibitions have been organized as *The Word of God* and *The Route of the Travellers* showing the geographic breadth of the Islamic world.

Opening

The Aga Khan Museum was open to the public on September 18, 2014. Henry Kim served as the museum's first Director and CEO since 2012. Prince Amyn Aga Khan was appointed the new Chairman of the Board effective May 18, 2016. The role was previously held by his brother, the Aga Khan, who still maintains a close connection to the museum as the sole Member of the Organization.

In 2016, RGD InHouse Design presented the Award of Distinction to the Aga Khan Museum for the exhibition Home Ground: Contemporary Art from the Barjeel Art Foundation (July 25, 2015 - January 3, 2016).[16]

Entrance to the museum in September 2014, several days after its opening.

The Director of Collections and Public Programs, Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis began her appointment on September 1, 2017. In 2017, the Aga Khan Museum Shop also launched an online shopping platform.[17] Most items online and onsite were commissioned exclusively for the Aga Khan Museum. In many instances, the items — jewellery, books, clothing, artwork, and more — are connected to the Aga Khan Museum's temporary exhibitions as well as its Permanent Collection.

The Aga Khan Museum was recognized as one of the best museums in Toronto by Conde Nast Traveler in 2018.[18] In the same year, the Aga Khan Museum's exhibition, The World of the Fatimids, received a Global Fine Art Award in the Ancient Art (BC – 1200) category, and an honourable mention in the Global Humanity category for the 2017 exhibition, Skate Girls of Kabul.[19] In June 2018, Sri Lankan-born chef Shen Ousmand launched a new menu at the Aga Khan Museum's restaurant Diwan.[20] The McEwan Group, led by Chef Mark McEwan, has been at the helm of the Museum's food services since 2016.

In 2021, Line 5 Eglinton, a new line that is part of the Toronto subway system will open an Aga Khan Park & Museum stop.

Architecture

The museum is surrounded by a landscaped park, serving as a interpretation of a Charbaag.

Designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Fumihiko Maki, the Aga Khan Museum shares a 6.8-hectare (17-acre) site with Toronto's Ismaili Centre, which was designed by Indian architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was created by landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic and is a contemporary interpretation of the Islamic courtyard—the Charbaag.

The Museum is home to galleries, exhibition spaces, classrooms, a reference library, auditorium and restaurant. It houses a permanent collection of over 1,000 objects including rare masterpieces of broad range of artistic styles and materials representing more than ten centuries of human history and geographic area.

Commissioned by the Aga Khan, the museum building and the spaces around were designed to be seen as a celebration and mysteries of light. The rectilinear building is oriented forty-five degrees to solar north where all its sides are exposed to the sun. The form has been chiseled to create a concaved angular profile that is also a natural expression of the two level building. Clad in sandblasted white Brazilian granite, the surfaces of the building are set in motion in a constant interplay with the sun in light and deep shadows. The effect is similar to a sundial.[21]

Within the building, there's a fully glazed courtyard intended as a permanent peaceful sanctuary. The courtyard's glass walls are imprinted with a double-layered pattern that creates a three dimensional effect recalling the traditional Islamic Jali screens. The light from the courtyard moves patterned shadows on the soffits, walls and floor of the grand cloister. Up above on the second level, four large openings overlook the

public spaces through a cast zinc screen in the form of a contemporary Musharabiya, an Islamic bay window. Within the galleries, large aluminum paneled skylights perforated with small hexagonal openings emit soft natural light into the exhibition areas.

The interior courtyard of the museum is surrounded by glass walls imprinted with a pattern reminiscent of traditional Islamic Jali screens.

Collection

The Aga Khan Museum is dedicated to the acquisition, preservation, display and interpretation of artifacts relating to the intellectual, cultural, artistic and religious traditions of Muslim communities, past and present. Artifacts include ceramics, metalwork, and paintings covering all periods of Islamic history. Manuscripts in the collection include the earliest known copy of Avicenna's Qanun fi'l-Tibb ("The Canon of Medicine") dated 1052.[8]

Works from the museum's collection are displayed in exhibits throughout the museum.

The museum will become a repository of historical materials related to the Ismaili community and house research programs related to each one of the aspects of its institutional mission. It will also provide a space for permanent exchanges between the Islamic and the Western worlds on educational, cultural and socio-economic issues.

The collection, which comprises some 1,000 objects,[22] includes several superb examples of Qur'an manuscripts that demonstrate the variety of script, media and decorative styles that evolved in the Muslim world. Among them, an eighth century North African folio demonstrates the earliest style of Kufic script written on parchment. A page from the well known *Blue Qur'an* provides an example of gold kufic script on indigo-dyed parchment. The Blue Qur'an is considered one of the most extraordinary Qur'an manuscripts ever created; its origins are 9th-tenth century North African, and it was likely created for the Fatimid caliphs ruling from Qayrawan.[8]

Located on the main floor of the museum, the Bellerive Room displays a selection from the ceramics collection of the late Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan and Princess Catherine Aga Khan. The room is a recreation of the “La Chambre Persane,” or “Persian Salon,” in their home, Château de Bellerive in Geneva, Switzerland, where part of the collection was originally on display. There are approximately 60 ceramic objects on view in the Bellerive room. They date from the early Islamic periods through to the 17th century. Their styles reflect the innovative technological and aesthetic contributions of Islamic potters through the ages, which were often in dialogue with influences from as far afield as China and Europe.

Selected temporary exhibitions

- Home Ground: Barjeel Art Foundation Modern Arab Art Collection (15 July 2015 - 3 January 2016)
- Abbas Kiarostami: Doors Without Keys (November 21, 2015 - March 28, 2016)
- Syria: A Living History (October 15, 2016 - February 26, 2017)
- Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians (February 4, 2017 - June 4, 2017)
- Syrian Symphony: New Compositions in Sight and Sound (May 20, 2017 - August 13, 2017)
- Here: Locating Contemporary Canadian Artists (July 22, 2017 - January 7, 2018)
- The World of the Fatimids (March 10, 2018 - July 2, 2018)
- The Moon: Voyage Through Time (March 9, 2019 - August 18, 2019)

- Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange Across Medieval Saharan Africa (September 21, 2019 - February 23, 2020)
- Don’t Ask Me Where I’m From (February 25, 2020 - April 13, 2020)
- Sanctuary (March 21, 2020 - August 23, 2020)

The new exhibition titled 'Don't Ask Me Where I'm From' will be hosted at the Aga Khan Museum from February through April 2020, in partnership with Fondazione Imago Mundi.[23][24] The project channels the experiences of artists who are first, second, and third-generation immigrants–a growing body of people raised in a culture other than their parents–in a series of several works exploring cross-cultural artistic realities.[25]

In popular culture

- The museum appeared in the *Star Trek: Discovery* episode "Lethe", where it was used as a filming location for scenes on the planet Vulcan.
- The scientific conference in the 2017 American science fiction comedy film *Downsizing* was filmed at the museum.

See also

- Aga Khan Park
- Aga Khan Trust for Culture
- Aga Khan Development Network
- List of museums in Toronto

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